

Creed and Culture in Clown World

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replying to [Charles Kesler's "The Crisis of American National Identity"](#)

Features

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American Mind

Conservatives must realize that in terms of creed and culture, we are past the point of no return. It's time for an offensive strategy.

In 2004, Samuel Huntington published

Who Are We?

on the disintegration of American identity. At the time of its publication, Huntington's willingness to even bring up

identity

as an issue was radical, even after sterilizing it. The idea that there was a coherent "we" half a century after progressives had sunk their teeth into American institutions of power, was—and still is—transgressive.

Huntington's project, so radical to his critics, was simply to rediscover conservatism in terms of culture: to ground conservative politics in something deeper than abstraction. Huntington insisted that America was an essentially WASP conception, but wanted little to do with the "white" part, or even the more narrowly ethnic "Anglo-Saxon" part.

Essentially,

Who Are We?

provided an academic justification for why English-derivative *culture*

provided the essential support for Protestant-derivative *creed*

in America. When James Nuechterlein

[reviewed](#)

the book in

Commentary

, he called it "defiantly unfashionable and counter-cultural."

In the

Claremont Review of Books

, Charles Kesler [refined](#) Huntington's thesis, concluding: "The American creed is the keystone of American national identity, but it requires a culture to sustain it. The republican task is to recognize the creed's primacy, the culture's indispensability, and the challenge, which political wisdom alone can answer, to shape a people that can live up to its principles."

Unfortunately, as a member of Generation Z, I must say I find this learned debate of limited value. More broadly, the way that mature, polite, and self-described “principled conservatives” talk about the Republic strikes me as endearing but overly sentimental. These boomers write nostalgic love letters to a world I never knew. They talk about the American creed as if a collective agreement on 18

th

-century political philosophy was enough to unite our country not only in the past, but to keep it united even now.

I truly respect their devotion to values and principles and their hope that the classical republican ideal is recoverable in a multicultural liberal democracy, as if the balkanization process has not already begun. From my vantage, it seems as if we are already living in a hollowed-out shell of a once-great nation where there is diminishing allowance for dissent—and, therefore, diminishing possibilities for recourse. Conservatives have not met the challenge. Whether to Huntington’s standards or to Kesler’s, they have decidedly failed in the “republican task.”

If, in the early 2000s, Americans were concerned for the viability of a society wherein broken families and communities were becoming the norm, we seem to accept one now where brokenness

is

the norm—and our elites, at least, have just stopped pretending to care. We now reside in a kind of bizarro-land, or, as some in my generation have termed it, “clown world.”

“Clown world” is one of the of the most striking memes to emerge in the realm of online political commentary lately. Like any spicy meme, it has been copied and edited by countless different groups, including some vile ones. But its reach is the product of a simple, philosophically devastating message. “Clown world” is used to describe instances of abasement that at any other point in history, to any person of dignity, would be regarded as incomprehensibly evil or stupid—so outrageous that they *must*

be a joke.

[State-enforced](#)

sexual transition hormones for children!

[Drag queen](#)

story hour!

[Voting rights](#)

for terrorists! This is Aristophanes with a shot of Nietzsche.

Nowhere is clown world more strongly advocated than in the supposedly neutral free market, where mainstream and powerful institutions like

[Chase Bank](#)

, the social media giants, and

[Delta](#)

airlines enforce even the most nihilistically absurd or self-refuting tenets of liberal secularism. Multinational corporations now actively participate in the demoralization of the country by cloaking themselves in the new public virtue and punishing consumers for wrongthink. The new culture of decadence and the new creed of self-actualization is anything but fringe—it is celebrated by mainstream media and enforced by corporate policy.

Huntington at least implicitly acknowledged what so many, out of ignorance or opportunism, had failed to notice about the nature of conservative politics: its inability, in the mirrored halls of the American funhouse, to conserve anything that was once good and wholesome about American life. Today's de-emphasis, if not outright mockery, of the nuclear family and the virtue culture Huntington so loved, with its ethic of loyalty, hard work, charity, and civil leadership, is the current byproduct of the failed efforts—or outright abdication—of the older generations of conservatives.

The resistance to insist on the American way, for no other reason than it is
ours

and that

this is reason enough

, has resulted in the Right's effectual acceptance of the Left's constantly moving goalposts of woke sensibility. In other words, conservatism gave up on culture. So afraid was the Right of charges of identity-based discrimination that they gradually ceded the whole symbolic, moral, and linguistic ground to the Left, relegating themselves to the "objective" realms of economy and war.

This, ultimately, is why Huntington remains notable—and controversial: he tried to reground conservatism in creed

and

culture, believing this revival might serve as a last bulwark against the deconstruction of American identity.

But conservative pundits continued to emphasize disembodied principles. They delayed action. They forwent dignity for the libertine. And as nascent clown world found no substantial pushback from their supposed enemies, it metastasized into a public dogma—an evisceration and replacement of both American culture and creed.

"Conservatives" allowed themselves to be forced to compete in the realm of performative wokeness where radical and bloodthirsty leftists set the narrative. Stupidly, the cheap Right

still

folds in behind the progressive vanguard with every new project, attempting to convince Leftist-created voting blocs that "we"

are the

true

torchbearers of liberality.

Capitalism

crushed

the patriarchy! The

GOP

is

actually

the party of immigration!

Conservatives are the

real

liberals!

No more. The ("small"-r) republican task should no longer be played as a game of liberal one-upmanship with progressives. What we now face is a culture

and

a creed subverted beyond recognition. Treating any of its distorted major features as something to be conserved would be like applying makeup to a rotting corpse.

It is interesting to

analyze

why liberalism failed, or why multiculturalism is a bankrupt philosophy, but there comes a point at which a good diagnosis must be met with a good prescription. Allow me, just now old enough to apprehend the freak show for what it is, to put something radical to my conservative forbearers: Little about

the present

state

of American life is worth conserving. Nothing of what the Founders envisioned remains.

The “republican task” can no longer be to speak sweetly of principles. The

new

“republican task” is to prioritize, unify, and galvanize the people who share a clear vision of the reality we

now

inhabit.

To adequately address this reality—to demolish the funhouse mirrors of clown world—will require radically rethinking the failed framework of policy on the Right. This will mean abandoning our timid relationship with state power for the time being. For years, we’ve been boxing with an MMA fighter. That is to say, we play by rules our opponent disregards. We play for points; they play for damage.

While we have state power, keeping in mind that the days when Republicans will still be able to win an election are numbered, we

must

use it to regulate big Tech. While we’re at it, let’s enforce the obscenity laws already on the books (and pass others if need be to make pornography effectively illegal). How about we roll back no-fault divorce, and prosecute the likes of the Sackler family and other elites who manufactured the opioid crisis and otherwise prey upon the American people?

Culture warriors must realize the nation’s center of gravity is not liberalism itself; it is instead the

families

who are brought up to value it. Philosophy lives in the people. Good philosophy, or a true understanding of political principles and purpose, can only exist in a *well-formed* person.

If the Right continues to stand by in their characteristically spineless defensive position as those families in heartland America are used, abused, atomized, and demoralized by enemy forces foreign and domestic, nothing will be recovered in the short or long term.

Put simply, the way forward is to inspire and pave the path for young patriots to reconstitute a republic when the current clownish surveillance state inevitably falls apart. It is to gird their loins for the coming collapse; and, after so much ground has been so carelessly given up, to gain a mild advantage—no matter the cost.

Conservatives must realize that in terms of creed and culture, we are past the point of no return. For ourselves and our posterity, it’s time for an offensive strategy.

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